

Fragments of Outer Defenses  
San Juan, Puerto Rico

HABS-PR-53

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO

Historical American Building Survey  
National Park Service  
San Juan National Historic Site

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Owner:

The remains of the Third Line are owned by the U. S. Army. The North end of the Second Line of defense is owned by the U. S. Navy. The wall fragments west of San Geronimo Fort, the remains of San Antonio Battery and the wall extending west from San Antonio Battery are all Insular properties.

Date of  
Erection:

No definite date can be ascertained. The 3rd. line is the oldest and was constructed in the late 18th. century. The first line was built after 1797 and before 1850; the second line between 1850 and 1861.

Builder:

The Corps of Engineers of the Spanish Army.

Present  
Condition:

All fragments are in a ruinous condition. On the third line of defense the stucco surfaces have deteriorated. Sea action has caused bad erosion of the pier especially along its East side, and the walls have cracked in two places, however, no under cutting of foundations are apparent. Erosion of the shoreline has eaten away the bearing for the outer section of the second line of defense and caused it to tumble and its fill cores to wash away. The upper section appears to be in fair condition except for its surface finishes, which have deteriorated badly. The fragments of the first line of Defense appear to be without structural flaws. All exposed surfaces are badly eroded. In San Antonio Battery there is some under cutting at the waterline, and a complete deterioration of wall surfaces. The modern structures of Dos Hermanos Bridge and of Guillermo Esteves Bridge infringe on the San Antonio Battery.

Materials of  
Construction:

All the wall fragments are constructed from masonry shells and rubble cores. The shells are tapered

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Towards the top and composed from a faced and coursed field stone, a local sandstone. Cornerings and lining courses are made from brick as are arches and aligning courses. All wall surfaces were stuccoed. The rubble of the cores are generally mixed with a combination of lime mortar and clay.

Other  
Existing  
Records:

Maps and Plane of San Juan showing the outer defenses:

- (1) Plano Geometrico del Puerto Capital de Puerto Rico, levantado por el Capitan de Navio de la Real Armada, Don Cosme de Churruca. Ano de 1794.  
Shows San Geronimo powder house and the third line of defense.
- (2) Plano Geometrico. El Puerto Capital de Puerto Rico. Construido por los Bergantines de S. M. Descubridor y Vigilante. Ano de 1794.  
Shows the same defenses as No. 1.
- (3) Isla de Puerto Rico. Por el Teniente Coronel Capitan de Ingenieros D. Francisco Coello.  
Ano de 1851.  
1st. line of defense is shown including San Antonio, San Geronimo Fort and powder house, Escambron and connecting walls.  
3rd. line is shown as in No. 1  
2nd. line is dotted in.
- (4) Plano de la Plaza de San Juan Bautista de Puerto Rico, hasta la primera linea avanzada.. Ano 1864.  
The easternmost end of San Juan island is not shown in this map.  
2nd. line of defense is shown as a wall, moat and a ravelin.  
3rd. line as in No. 1 a moat and an embankment across the island and along part of the North coast ending in a pier.

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- (5) Plano de la zona de la isleta donde se halla asentada la Ciudad de San Juan de Puerto Rico comprendiendo el Cano de San Antonio, ensenada de Miraflores y manglares intermedios. Ano 1871. Por Evaristo de Churruca.  
All three lines shown as in No. 3.
- (6) Plano de la Plaza de San Juan de Puerto Rico, levantado por el Cuerpo de Ingenieros Militares. Ano 1887.  
1st. and 2nd. lines shown as in No. 5.  
3rd. line as a moat only. No wall is shown along the North coast.
- (7) Plano de la Plaza de San Juan de Puerto Rico y sus alrededores, levantado por el Cuerpo de Ingenieros Militares. Ano 1887.  
Same as No. 6.
- (8) Plano de la Ciudad de San Juan de Puerto Rico, y del Yslote en que se halla situada dicha poblacion, 1873. Leonardo de Tejeda (Expediente relating to the widening of the Plaza de San Juan in Puerto Rico in the years 1888 and 1889) NHS-SJ-9271. 1st, 2nd, and 3rd. line shown as in No. 6.
- (9) Plano de la Plaza de San Juan de Puerto Rico, 1872. (Expediente relating to the widening of the Plaza de San Juan in Puerto Rico in the years 1888 and 1889). NHS-SJ-9269. All lines shown as in No. 6.
- (10) Croquis de los Terrenos comprendidos entre el recinto del frente de tierra y la altura llamada del Olimpo que se pretende ocupar con nuevas obras de fortificacion. (Expediente relating to the widening of the Plaza de San Juan in Puerto Rico in the years 1888 and 1889) NHS-SJ-9268. As in No. 6.

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- (11) Plano Topografico de la Bahia de San Juan de Puerto Rico. Antonio Padial y Vizcarrondo. (Expediente relating to the widening of the Plaza de San Juan in Puerto Rico in the years 1888 and 1889). NHS-SJ-9270. As in No. 6.
- (12) Naval chart of San Juan de Puerto Rico. 1898 (NHS-SJ 9765)
- (13) Croquis de la Capital y de los terrenos que pueden ganarse a lo mar. 1877 (Expediente relating to the widening of the Plaza de San Juan in Puerto Rico in the years 1888 and 1889) NHS-SJ 9267. As No. 6.
- (14) Military Reservation of San Juan, Puerto Rico. (O.Q.M.C.) 1915. As No. 6.
- (15) San Juan de Puerto Rico. 1890 (NHS-SJ-9594 A,B) As No. 6.
- (16) Plano de la Plaza de San Juan. 1897 (NHS-SJ-9162B) As No. 6.
- (17) Map of San Juan Island. 1901 (NHS-SJ-9162A) As No. 6.

Additional  
Data:

The Outer defenses on San Juan island consisted of three lines.

The third line, the first to be built, was constructed halfway between the fort of San Cristobal and the east end of the island of San Juan. The first line, was next constructed along the East coast connecting the older fortified position of San Antonio, San Geronimo and Escambron and the second line, between the two, cutting the island just West of what is now

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Additional  
Data (Cont.)

Munoz Rivera Park. The earliest available map to show the third line of defense is dated 1794.<sup>1</sup> The very detailed map by Tomas O'Daly of 1776 as well as the Don Tomas Lopez chart of 1785 show the fortified positions of the Eastern tips of the island of San Juan but have no indications of the third line. It consisted of a moat and a wall cutting across the island at its narrowest point. The wall continued West along the bluffs of the North shore for approximately 500 yards and terminated in a pier. The pier is still in existence and together with traces of wall foundation at two points along the North shore forms the remainder of the 3rd. line.

The first line of defense was built after the British attack of 1797, however no definite building date can be ascertained with present available sources.<sup>2</sup> The earliest map to show the line is dated 1851.<sup>3</sup> The line connected the older fortified positions of Escambron Battery, San Geronimo Fort and Powder House and San Antonio Battery. It was primarily an obstacle for a landing attack rather than a defensive position and consisted of a high parapet wall of Masonry work extending approximately 4000 feet along the easternmost shore of the Island of San Juan. A Retreat Line of similar masonry work ran from a point south of the entrance to San Geronimo and then west to the Powder Magazine. This Line protected the retreat of the garrison of San Geronimo and Escambron Battery, in case an enemy crossed the San Antonio bridge fort.

Three parts of the first line of defense have been covered by individual surveys, The San Geronimo Powder House HABS-NY-46, San Geronimo Fort HABS-PR-49 and the Escambron Battery HABS-PR-50. The only other remains are the wall fragments immediately south of the Caribe Hilton Hotel, the San Antonio Battery and the wall extend North West from San Antonio Battery.

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Additional  
Data (Cont.)

The second line of defense was finished before 1861. In 1851 it was still shown as proposed. It consists of a moat and a wall across San Juan island between the 3rd. and 1st. line. A ravelin was located just South of the center of the island.

The Ravelin has been covered by a separate Survey HABS-PR-51. Others remains are the walls above the bluffs and the North shore of San Juan island at a point straight North of the Ravelin.

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1. See list of maps
  2. The only three general works available were: Adolfo de Hostos, Ciudad Murada. Editorial Lex, La Habana, 1948, 194-195; Edward A. Hoyt, A History of the Harbor Defenses of San Juan, 1509-1898. San Juan, 1943, 97-98; Angel Rivero, Cronica de la Guerra Hispano Americana en Puerto Rico. Madrid, 1922, 54.
  3. See list of maps

  
Frederik C. Gjessing (Architect)

  
Approved